

Elizabeth Robinson

Jamie Blue

University Laboratory High School, Urbana

Teacher: Adele Suslick

In 1928, Elizabeth Robinson became the first female Olympic track and field gold medalist in the one hundred meter dash and the first silver medalist in the 4x100 relay race. After returning to the United States from the Olympics, however, Elizabeth was involved in a plane crash that prevented her from participating in sports for three years. Despite this setback, Elizabeth made an incredible come back and won the gold medal in the 4x100 relay race at the 1936 Olympics.

Harry and Elizabeth Robinson gave birth to Elizabeth on August 23, 1911, in Riverdale, Illinois. In high school, her athletic talent became obvious. As Elizabeth was running to catch a train after school, her biology teacher Mr. Price, who was also assistant coach to the track team, noticed her incredible speed. He asked her to run a fifty meter dash at school, and she did so in record time. Suddenly, Elizabeth had been discovered as a young female athlete with great potential.

Elizabeth learned quickly and began to compete immediately. Her first race was on March 30, 1928, at the Bankers Meet in Chicago. In the 100 meter race, Elizabeth placed second behind Helen Finkey, the American women's record holder for the one hundred meter dash. After that race, Elizabeth accepted an offer to compete and train with the Illinois Women's Athletic Club, and she traveled to the north side of Chicago to work out three times a week. On July 4 in Newark, New Jersey at the young age of sixteen, Elizabeth qualified for both the Olympic 4x100 and for the one hundred meter dash after participating in only three competitive races in her career.

Elizabeth and her teammates sailed together to Amsterdam to compete in the Olympics. While on the ship, the team practiced on a quarter mile linoleum track around the deck of the ship. After nine days, the boat anchored, but the athletes did not compete for a week, allowing them to adjust to the new environment and to continue training.

Elizabeth advanced farther than the rest of her team at the Olympics. The one hundred meter race was the first race of the Women's Track and Field events. Elizabeth beat Canada's Myrtle Cook and advanced to the finals. On the day of the 100 meter finals, nerves were strung as the contestants took their positions for the race. Both Myrtle Cook and Freulein Schmidt jumped the gun twice, disqualifying them from the race and leaving only four athletes to compete. Elizabeth was calm and composed as the athletes took their lanes. Elizabeth had Fanny Rosenfeld of Canada, who had beaten her in a previous race, in the lane to the right. Fanny got off to a good start as the gun sounded. Approaching the midpoint, Fanny and Elizabeth were dead even, but in the last few yards Elizabeth pulled away beating Fanny with a time of 12.2 seconds. After running track for only four months, Elizabeth had made world history.

Returning from the Olympics, Elizabeth began to work toward a degree in physical education at Northwestern University. She trained for the next Olympics until she was in a plane crash while traveling over Harvey, Illinois in June 1931. Elizabeth was nearly killed, and she was hospitalized for more than eleven weeks. She suffered facial lacerations, a crushed arm, a cracked hip, and a broken leg. A silver pin was inserted into her broken leg to hold the bone together, making her left leg slightly shorter than her right leg. Her knee also became "stiff," so bending it became difficult. Doctors said she would never compete again.

Elizabeth spent three years in physical therapy before she decided to try to run again. She discovered she was not as fast as she used to be, but she believed that if she worked hard enough, she might still be able to make the team. Elizabeth began to train with the Illinois Athletic Club in hopes of joining the 1936 Olympic team. After long months of training, Elizabeth qualified for the 4x100 meter relay.

The team preformed well. After making it through the preliminary rounds, the United States advanced to the Olympic finals. Elizabeth was eager for revenge in the 4x100 after placing second in the 1928 Olympics. The day of the race finally arrived, and the runners took their places. The gun sounded, and the race began. Germany had the lead until the baton was dropped, allowing Elizabeth and her teammates to win gold.

In conclusion, Elizabeth was the first female track and field athlete to win gold. She overcame tremendous obstacles in life and pushed past them showing she was a strong, brave woman able to handle any situation. After Elizabeth's second Olympic gold medal in 1936, she stopped running and married Richard Schwartz in 1938. Elizabeth, however, gave inspirational speeches all around the country on behalf of the Women's Athletic Association and the Girls' Athletic Association. She was inducted into the National Track and Field, U.S. Track and Field, and Helms Hall of Fame. After a life of success, Elizabeth died at age eighty-seven. To this day, Elizabeth remains the youngest woman ever to win the one hundred meter dash at the Olympics. [From Lifechums. "Dementia Series-Disabled Legend Betty Schwartz." *Lifechums*. 17 July 2008. <<http://lifechums.wordpress.com/2008/07/17/dementia-series-disabled-legend-betty-schwartz/>>. (Sept. 11, 2008); Duncan Mackay, "A pioneering woman athlete, her Olympic record stands unbroken." *The Guardian* 25 May 1999: 22. Rpt. in *Obituary*.

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